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Insight and Outlook By Joseph Kraft

White House Whip

THE WHITE House staff, never exactly a static institution, is now far more than usually in a state of flux.

McGeorge Bundy, the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and the foremost personality on the staff, is apt to leave his post in the near future.

Bill Moyers, the press secretary and an almost equally impressive figure, is in the running for the Bundy post—a sign that he is not altogether happy with his present lot.

Jack Valenti, the staff man best known to the pub-



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lic after Moyers and Bundy, would like to go to Rome as replacement for Ambassador Frederick Reinhardt.

Lee White, the President's Special Counsel and an almost ideal White House staff man who has combined high effectiveness (notably in the civil rights field) with real anonymity for five years, has long been planning to leave.

No one has yet been named to take the place of Postmaster General Lawrence O'Brien as the chief White House liaison man with the Congress. The President's domestic program is largely in the hands of three relative newcomers—Harry McPherson, Joseph Califano and Douglas Cater—with no single leading figure.

AMIDST all this coming and going, however, there has been one fixture—Marvin Watson, the President's Appointments Secretary. And his role provides an insight into the problem of working for a President with a Baron Munchausen side, a President prone to exaggeration who is not best served when his every wish is followed to the letter.

Watson is chiefly known around Washington as a man of right-wing views because of past associations with Gov. John Connally of Texas and the even more conservative chairman of the Lone Star Steel Company. But far more important than Watson's political views seems to be a general lack of sophistication and imagination that find expression in an almost total

literal-mindedness in carrying out policy.

For example, Watson was at one point deputed to ask a prominent New York lawyer to serve as co-chairman of a civil rights committee. Somewhat confused to begin with he asked the lawyer to be a committee member. The lawyer, who had an advance idea of what was afoot, pointed out that he was already on the committee, and asked if it wasn't a question of becoming co-chairman. Watson broke off the discussion, saying that he had to check. Days went by before he confirmed the President's wish to have the lawyer serve as co-chairman of the committee.

As Appointments Secretary, Watson has very little to do with the formation of policy and program. But he has branched out into the personnel field. President Johnson has made a practice of personally interviewing all candidates for jobs above the regular civil service level.

When the President is away or indisposed, however, Watson does the interviewing. Thus to the horror of sensitive people in both the White House and the departments he has been judging people up for consideration in such agencies as the Office of Education.

WATSON HAS also emerged as the White House security hound, working directly with the Director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover. There has recently gone into effect a telephone sys-

tem whereby the central White House operator, before putting calls through to individual staff members, asks the name of the calling party. To many people that looks like a surveillance of communications between the White House staff and people on the outside.

Watson's roles as personnel and security officer have merged in at least one important substantive act. It involved a distinguished former law professor who had for years been dealing with the most highly classified material as an official in the Central Intelligence Agency and the Bureau of the Budget.

He had agreed to become chairman of the Tariff Commission, had been accepted and approved by the President, and was lining up support on Capitol Hill. At that point, J. Edgar Hoover and Watson collaborated to kill the nomination. No explanation was given, but the general theory is that the FBI was settling scores with the CIA.

No one suggests that Watson is acting on his own. He acts as an agent of the President, to whom he is undoubtedly loyal. Blindly loyal, in fact. But it is a question whether the President is well served by idolators. One of his most highly respected former aides has said of Watson: "Marvin is going to get the President in trouble." And another says: "I've never seen anyone that crude around the White House."

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